

Joseph Kraft *Post 9-19-74*

Chile, the CIA and National Security

The fuss over the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in Chile is not really about that agency or that country. It emerges chiefly from a deep general suspicion of the instruments of national security. If he truly wants to heal the country, President Ford will have to go out of his way to assuage this suspicion.

Two major questions ought to be asked at all times about the CIA. The first engages the role of the agency in making and unmaking foreign governments by the black arts of sabotage and subversion.

That issue seems to be central to the present stir over Chile. The case grew out of a letter written by Rep. Michael Harrington (D-Mass.) and leaked to the press. The letter purported to summarize testimony to a House subcommittee by William Colby, the present director of the CIA.

According to the letter, Colby testified that the agency spent \$8 million between 1970 and 1973 to help the opposition to the Popular Front government of Chilean President Salvador Allende. The letter said the funds were used in order to achieve the "destabilization" of the regime. The implication was that the CIA arranged the coup which overthrew Allende last year.

In fact, the word "destabilization" was not used by Mr. Colby in his testimony. It is hardly thinkable that so small a sum—for \$8 million is virtually nothing in the modern intelligence game—could have caused the fall of the Chilean government. President

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Ford said at his news conference what most informed sources also say—that the money was used only to sustain democratic newspapers and political leaders. It is as clear as it can ever be in this sort of murky business that the CIA did not play a significant role in the Chilean coup. Indeed, Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), who received the letter in July, wrote to Rep. Harrington at that time, saying he saw nothing new in it.

The second big question turns on the responsiveness of the CIA to the elected leadership in the White House and the Congress. Everybody agrees that in Chile the CIA was obedient to the wishes of the Nixon administration.

What is in doubt is the question of keeping Congress informed. Several high officials—including Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former CIA Director Richard Helms—denied in testimony before various elements of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States had fomented the Chilean coup.

Technically, those statements appear to have been accurate. Moreover, it is traditional that black bag operations of the agency are not revealed to the regular legislative committees of the Congress but to a special watchdog committee. Even if they did not tell the strict truth about such operations to the Foreign Relations Committee, in other words, Messrs. Kissinger and Helms and the others were operating within established guidelines.

However, if the particulars of the Chilean case do not justify the fuss, the general atmosphere of the past few years does. Throughout the Vietnam war, the Congress and much of the country were systematically deceived about the operation of the CIA and other instruments of national security policy. Over and over again in the Watergate case, President Nixon and those around him invoked the term "national security" as the justification for covering up common crimes.

Many intelligent and well-meaning people have come to believe that the whole apparatus of national security is

bogus—a cover for something illegitimate and improper. That is why the apparent improprieties of the CIA in Chile have excited such attention.

If President Ford is to end what he has called the long national nightmare, he will have to soften these feelings. Unfortunately, he seems not to understand the depths of the doubts about national security. Thus when questioned about Chile at his news conference Monday night, he gave a national security response straight out of the 1950s: "Our government, like other governments, does take certain actions in the intelligence field to implement foreign policy and to protect national security."

The same lack of understanding entered into the blunder committed in the pardoning of President Nixon. The administration theory was that the curse would be taken off the pardon by the amnesty for Vietnam war resisters. Mr. Ford evidently did not realize that the opposition to Vietnam rested on deep general doubts about national security actions—not on the relatively trivial issue of the draft-dodgers.

The point of all this is that the country is seriously and deeply divided on fundamental issues of national security. President Ford is going to have to take account of those divisions. He will have to try to understand the other side. Otherwise, he will end up, as his two predecessors did, limping out of the White House.